



Gordon sees freeway on reservation

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Phoenix Mayor Phil Gordon reiterated his opposition to the proposed South Mountain Freeway along Pecos Road in Ahwatukee Foothills and urged residents to spend their energy on getting the route moved south to nearby Gila River reservation land.

"Until it's built, it's not a done deal," Gordon said Tuesday at his first Town Hall meeting at Pecos Community Center organized by Phoenix and *The Ahwatukee Republic*.

About 85 people, excluding staff with the city and *The Republic*, attended the forum.

Gordon likened the ongoing debate over where and whether to build the 10-lane, 22-mile freeway to the proposed Paradise Parkway that long held a spot on Valley transportation maps.

But opposition over the controversial east-west route through north Phoenix eventually sunk the plan and "ultimately, that freeway was taken off the map," the mayor said.

Before his political career, Gordon lived a few blocks from the proposed project, which was born in 1960 as the first freeway system plan for the Valley.

Critics decried the project as too expensive and too harmful for the area, planned just north of Camelback Road from 16th Street in Phoenix to 73rd Avenue in Glendale.

The Arizona Department of Transportation was so sure of the route, it bought hundreds of properties in its path. Like the proposed South Mountain Freeway, Phoenix residents believed the long-delayed project was dead and were shocked when it was resurrected in 1985.

Craig Tribken, a Phoenix city councilman whose district would have been dissected by the Paradise Parkway, eventually got the project killed.

ADOT - and ultimately state taxpayers - were left with several hundred properties that had to be auctioned to recoup the buyouts.

Worse yet, Gordon said, the area became blighted and was slow to return to its original vigor.

"Even after it was taken off the map and we stopped the freeway, we didn't provide a viable option" to revitalize the area or provide an east-west route through north Phoenix, Gordon said.

"So my plea is that we take all the energy" going into fighting the Pecos alignment "and create a viable option," he

said. "And the only viable option is to take it south onto Gila River land. That's going to be our goal. If all we do is stop it, we still have the traffic problems."

In November, the Gila River Indian Community's tribal council adopted a resolution to create a transportation team to begin "exploratory negotiations" with ADOT and federal agencies over various roadways, including the South Mountain Freeway and Interstate 10.

The tribe has been quiet about its intentions since then, and Gordon didn't say whether he planned to meet with tribal leaders to put the freeway on reservation land.

"There's not a bright light" of hope, he said, but then offered his own. "It's been quiet. To me, that's a good sign."

Asked whether he would meet with leaders of the Maricopa Association of Governments, who must vote on whether to fund the estimated \$1.7 billion project, Gordon dodged the question and talked instead about his opposition to the freeway's route instead.

ADOT is studying the environmental impacts of the freeway and ultimately will decide, along with the Federal Highway Administration, as to whether it will be built. But MAG, which comprises City Council-appointed representatives from each city in Maricopa County, must decide whether to fund the freeway using a half-cent sales tax increase approved by voters in 2004.

Attendees to Tuesday's Town Hall also wanted to know whether South Mountain Park, through which ADOT would cut a large swath to make room for the freeway, is controlled by Phoenix or state agencies.

"There is no bottom line in the law," said Gordon, a lawyer. "The preserve is the property of the city of Phoenix and we cannot give, exchange or sell any preserve land without voter approval."

But ADOT can condemn the land using its powers of eminent domain for a public use, "right or wrong," Gordon explained. "The question is whether the state is required to have a vote."

Gordon also answered questions about rapid transit bus service and local bus service to and from Ahwatukee Foothills. Both the frequency of service and number of routes will increase, he vowed.

Long-term, more freeways and more public transit are needed to accommodate the occupants of 90,000 new homes being built each year in the Valley, he said.

"We need to build more freeways because the people are coming," he said.